Ulysses S. Grant
USMA Class of 1843

President and General Ulysses S. Grant was born in 1822 in Ohio to Jesse and Hannah Grant. His grandfather, Noah Grant, had fought at the Battle of Bunker Hill in the Revolutionary War. Grant reported to the U.S. Military Academy in the summer of 1839, and due to a clerical error, his name was recorded as “Ulysses S. Grant” instead of his name since birth, Hiram Ulysses Grant. He graduated 21st (of 39) in his class but was known as the best cadet in horsemanship during his time at the Academy.

As an Infantry officer, Grant served with distinction in 1846 in the Mexican-American War, leading charges and displaying his equestrian expertise in the battles of Resaca de la Palma and Monterrey. He was brevetted to first lieutenant and captain for bravery at Molino del Rey and San Cosme. Grant resigned from the Army in 1854 and moved to Missouri and then Illinois with his family.

Grant volunteered his services to the Union Army when war broke out in 1861, entering as a Colonel in the Illinois volunteers and quickly promoted to Brigadier General after his troops were identified as the best-trained unit in camp. Campaigning in the west, Grant and his forces captured Forts Henry and Donelson in the Union’s first major victories and instigated Grant’s new nickname, “Unconditional Surrender.” While troops in the east were fighting at Gettysburg Grant won five battles in 18 days at Vicksburg, once again accepting a Confederate unconditional surrender and taking control of the Mississippi River.

By early 1864 Grant was promoted to lieutenant general, and Lincoln had given him command of all Union forces. After the Confederate surrender at Appomattox, Grant continued as commander of the U.S. Army and his duties included implementing Reconstruction in the south, western forts and Mexican border disputes. Grant resigned his commission from the Army in 1868 in order to run for President on the Republican ticket. Grant won the 1868 Presidential election with 214 electoral votes to his opponent’s 80, and at the time was the nation’s youngest elected President.

During his Presidency, the 15th Amendment to the Constitution was ratified, the first National Park established, and the first Civil Rights Act passed. Grant was reelected in 1872 and declined to run for a third term. After the Presidency, Grant embarked on a world tour. A few years before his death, he made some unwise business decisions and, in order to settle his debts, sold off many of his personal possessions and agreed to write his memoirs. Grant died of throat cancer in 1885 five days after completing his memoirs. The first building memorialized at the U.S. Military Academy was the cadet mess, named Grant Hall in 1887, and Grant’s statue on the Parade Field was dedicated in 2019.